

Washington, DC -- U.S. Representative Michael A. Arcuri (D-Utica) expressed his strong support today for legislation, expected to pass the House of Representatives this week, which provides an additional \$401 million for the Social Security Administration (SSA) to maintain existing offices and staff.

“During a recent meeting with high-level SSA officials it was made clear to me that without additional administrative funding, the agency would be forced to close field offices around the country,” **said Arcuri, who spoke on the floor of the House today in support of the SSA funding.** “In response, I have advocated for these critical funds in order to keep SSA field offices like Auburn open and providing face-to-face services to those in need. I am pleased that the legislation the House will pass this week contains the much needed funding increase, and I hope that SSA will put those funds to good use and keep our Auburn SSA field office open.”

The legislation, H.R. 3043, the fiscal year 2008 Departments of Labor, Health and Human Services, Education and Related Agencies Appropriations bill provides \$9.3 billion for SSA administrative expenses. The \$9.3 billion represents a \$401 million increase over the FY 2007 level and a \$100 million increase above the President’s request.

“Since May, I have been working in Washington to get answers from the SAA about their plan to close the Auburn office, and have repeatedly called on the Administration not to close a field office that helps thousands of disabled and elderly residents,” **Arcuri said.** “Many local residents do not have the means or the mobility to travel the long distances to Geneva or Syracuse for necessary face-to-face service.”

SSA provides monthly cash benefits to nearly 55 million Americans each year, and the funds will help to improve processing times for initial disability claims and hearings, which have risen in recent years. It will also help to reduce the backlog of disability cases as well as allow SSA to process additional disability reviews and SSI eligibility determinations.

“The Auburn Social Security Office is a critical community resource that serves some of our most vulnerable citizens and should remain open,” **said Arcuri.** “I urge the Senate to take action and pass this bill and I’m calling on the President to sign it into law so that the Auburn office can continue to serve the most vulnerable members of our community.”

In May, immediately after hearing that the Auburn office was being considered for closure by the Social Security Administration, Arcuri sent a letter to SSA Commissioner Michael J. Astrue stating his strong opposition to closing the office.

In a follow-up letter to SSA Commissioner Michael J. Astrue, Arcuri reiterated his strong opposition to the proposed closing of the Auburn office and requested a service delivery assessment of the Auburn SSA office and projected annual retirement applications for SSA Area 6 and the entire New York Region for the next five fiscal years.

Of the approximately 81,000 people living in Cayuga County, 19,745 are Social Security beneficiaries who receive services through the Auburn office.

Below is the colloquy Arcuri and House Appropriations Committee Chairman David Obey (WI) had on the floor of the U.S. House of Representatives today in support of the SSA funding increase. In the course of the debate, Representative James Walsh (R-Syracuse), who represented the Auburn area before the 2000 redistricting, voiced his support for Arcuri's position.

Colloquy on SSA Field Offices Mr. Obey and Mr. Arcuri

Mr. Arcuri: Mr. Chairman, I rise to enter into a colloquy with the distinguished Chairman of the Appropriations Committee and Labor-HHS Subcommittee, Mr. Obey.

My intention today is to raise the awareness of Members of the House of Representatives surrounding the issue of the administrative budget of the Social Security Administration (SSA) and the impact it has on real people across America. Because previous Congresses have failed to meet the basic funding requirements of SSA, the agency is in the process of closing field offices to try to reign in costs. One of those field offices is in the 24th district of New York, my district, in the city of Auburn, New York. Auburn serves as the population base for rural Cayuga County, and of the approximately 81,000 residents of that county, nearly 20,000 or 25

percent, are Social Security beneficiaries.

Closing the field office in Auburn, New York means that those 20,000 beneficiaries, most of whom are elderly, will need to drive over 25 miles each way to get to the next closest offices in Syracuse or Geneva, New York. Public transportation is inadequate in this area and this potential closing will mean that many residents will simply not have access to SSA for face-to-face interviews. Staff at SSA has explained that services can be provided by phone or through SSA's online system, but for these financially vulnerable beneficiaries, these are not real options. I do not believe that SSA should close or consolidate field offices until the agency reports back to Congress regarding the number of recipients who would be negatively impacted and allow the Congress to thoroughly review the economic analysis of potential field office realignment, consolidation, or closing proposals.

Mr. Obey: I share the gentleman's concerns about the Social Security administrative budget and make note that between 2001 and 2007, the amounts appropriated to the Social Security Administration (SSA) failed to meet the Administration's budget requests by nearly \$900 million. Since January, the Committee has provided nearly \$550 million in additional resources to SSA. In fiscal year 2007, we were forced to clean up the mess left to us by the Republicans who failed to act on discretionary appropriations, but we still made SSA a priority and included \$148 million over the FY06 funding level. In the bill we are debating today, the Committee has included over \$401 million above the FY07 level and \$100 million more than the request.

Mr. Arcuri: Mr. Chairman, I understand that you are making every effort to reverse the trend of underfunding SSA to ensure that the agency can keep up with increasing workloads due to the retirement of the first crop of baby boomers and on the increasing backlog of disability claims. I hope that we will be able to work together as this bill moves forward to make certain that SSA has adequate funding to keep the field offices open that provide the Social Security benefits that keep the elderly and those with disabilities out of poverty.

Mr. Obey: I would be happy to work toward increasing this amount in conference and in future years. Members should be aware, however, that we will NOT be able to retain even this additional \$100 million provided for SSA above the request if the President vetoes the bill and a veto is sustained.

Mr. Arcuri: I thank Chairman Obey for your support for efforts to keep the Social Security field offices open and for your willingness to work on increasing SSA funding in conference. These

efforts will make a real difference in the lives of thousands of Americans not only in my district, but around the country.

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